**Laramie County Department of Family Services Review**

Date of Review: December 16-17, 2014

The Wyoming Citizen Review Panel (WYCRP) conducted interviews of staff and community stakeholders to compile information about the state of child welfare in the Laramie County area.

Total Interviews:

DFS Staff – 20

Community Stakeholders – 22

Foster Parent Meeting -7 (these were two separate meetings)

**Laramie County Demographics:**

* As of 2013 Laramie County’s population was 95,809 people.
* The Wyoming State Capital is in Laramie County
* The Wyoming Department of Family Services offices are located in Cheyenne

**Strengths:**

1. The local DFS office is seen as a collaborative partner by the local stakeholders. Stakeholders commented that they will hear back from caseworkers in a timely manner when they are approached.
2. MDT’s are facilitated by Life Net however DFS caseworkers are provided an opportunity to invite essential individuals. The MDT focuses on providing opportunities for all parties to have equal opportunity to participate in the discussion.
3. Children under the age of six who have gone into placement are being referred to STRIDE Learning Center for developmental screenings. Caseworkers provide the information to the foster parents so that they can schedule at their convenience. It is reported that these screenings are being conducted within the 30 time period.
4. Signs of Safety is beginning to be implemented in this office. There has been talk of a new strategy for signs of safety being implemented after the first of the year.
5. The workers know of the resources that are available in our community and recognize that we have more so than most communities. The workers are using them to the up most advantage.
6. When bringing on new caseworkers there is job shadowing so that they can directly see how parts of their job are done. This is very beneficial for the new workers.
7. Caseworkers report that overall they are able to complete their face to faces visits on a monthly basis.

**Opportunities for Growth:**

1. Laramie County is experiencing a lack of foster families. This has a potential to increase re-entry and decrease the likelihood of long term permanency.
2. It has been reported that it would be helpful to have a foster family support group. It was expressed that this would help new families connect with experienced foster families and allow for the opportunity to share resources and information about respite care.
3. It has been reported that there should be more options for respite foster homes available for foster homes to use.
4. It was reported that transitioning youth are having difficulty acquiring the skills needed for independent living prior to leaving protective custody. Some of the areas which are reported to be lacking are transitions for continuation of mental health services and skills for financial independence.
5. This office has recently experienced a significant staff turn over. There is a concern that if the vacancies are not filled in a timely manner it will impact staff burn out and will negatively impact case work.
6. There is a lack of inpatient mental health options for children and many children end up at WBI or in out of state placements. It would be beneficial to investigate options for additional services in the state of Wyoming.
7. The onboarding process and training supports should be evaluated to determine the best way to train new workers so that they are adequately supported before taking on a case load independently.
8. Foster parents feel that there is a lack of training opportunities related to issues that directly impact how they work with children in their homes.
9. It has been reported that foster parents are feeling a lack of resources that are available, or they are not being properly informed about what resources are out there to help them.
10. It is being reported that the initial training for foster parents needs more information that directly relates to how to deal with specific needs of each individual child.

**Recommendation (local and state)**

1. Ongoing training for WYCAPS especially when updates are made. It was also recommended to create “cheat sheet” for general data entry steps into WYCAPS could be distributed upon hiring of a new staff. Staff could then update this information after CORE training and after WYCAPS updates.
2. Further training with law enforcement and staff regarding procedures for drug endangered children.
3. There needs to look into a crisis shelter and what needs to be done in regards to having one in Cheyenne again.
4. A support group for foster parents would be helpful to keep them connected and offer assistance and training to those who are needing additional resources. This also would just give a support system to foster parents with other foster parents.
5. A statewide foster parent recruitment effort would be beneficial to have options for placement, especially for older youth and children with disabilities.
6. Investigate training opportunities for foster parents related to the specific needs that are identified by the foster parents.
7. Open respite options up beyond what they are now with just other foster homes. Let foster families use more family members.
8. More training available for the foster parents to help them know how to deal with children that they could take care of. Examples of trainings would be ADHD, RAD, and sexual assault victims. In person trainings would be preferred yet online would also work and be beneficial for doing on your own time.
9. A mentorship program that can be for old workers and new workers. This would give the new workers some opportunities for in house help and to rely on to support them while they are learning the ropes.
10. Although the office has state vehicles for use, it would be beneficial when considering future vehicles to purchase a four wheel drive due to adverse weather conditions and remote travel locations.
11. Continue communication with local stakeholders including law enforcement and the court staff regarding roles of each entity and making decisions together that are in the best interest of the child and family so that there is no confusion moving the case forward.

**Summary:**

Laramie County is working together to improve the lives of children and families. It is beneficial that the Cheyenne has adequate resources to meet most of the needs of families. Wyoming is a rural state which makes it necessary to utilize some resources out of the area to meet the needs of children and families. When this is necessary it appears that there is adequate communication to meet the needs of the family as well as the other involved parties. This office is still recovering from the all of the turnover and training the new caseworkers. They are all working on the community relationships and utilizing the resources.